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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
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RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1877  
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RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000191

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/16/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ODIP](#) [AMGT](#) [CMGT](#) [PINR](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: MFA DEMANDS EMBASSY MINSK CUT STAFF TO 17

Classified By: Charge Jonathan Moore for reason 1.4 (d).

REF: A) Minsk 181 (and previous)  
B) State 26143  
C) Minsk 190

Summary

1. (C) MFA America's Department Director Vadim Lazerko called in Charge March 17 to repeat the Ministry's request that the Embassy cut its staff to seventeen, the number of diplomats and staff at Belarus' Embassy in Washington and New York Consulate General. Lazerko said the Embassy had until 3:00 p.m. March 24 to submit a list of the diplomats who would remain, or the MFA would PNG U.S. diplomats to reduce the Embassy's staff accordingly. Lazerko also restated several times the GOB position that Ambassador Stewart may not return to Belarus prior to the return of Belarus' Ambassador to Washington. End summary.

MFA Orders Cut to Seventeen

2. (C) At 3:00 p.m. March 17 MFA America's Department Director Vadim Lazerko called in Charge to deliver additional messages related to the Ministry's response to USG sanctions against Belarusian petrochemical conglomerate Belneftekhim. He noted that the Ministry's communications had included three points -- recall of the U.S. Ambassador for consultations, cuts to U.S. Embassy staff and regulations on Embassy staff travel and government contacts -- and that he wished to touch on the first two.

3. (C) On the departure of Ambassador Stewart, Lazerko asked the Charge to confirm that the USG understood that Ambassador Stewart was not to return to Belarus prior to the return of Belarus' Ambassador Mikhail Khvostov to Washington. Charge responded that this information, which had been in Belarus' most recent diplomatic note (ref A), had been passed to Washington.

4. (C) On staffing cuts, Lazerko told the Charge that the GOB insisted that Embassy staff be cut to the level of Belarusian diplomatic presence in the United States. Lazerko presented Charge with a list of the seventeen

diplomats and staff resident at their Embassy in Washington and Consulate General in New York. (Note: Embassy will fax this list to EUR/UMB. End note.) Lazerko further requested that within 24 hours the Embassy present the MFA with a list of all U.S. diplomats present in Belarus. By March 24 at 3:00 p.m. (local time) the Embassy must present a list of the seventeen U.S. diplomats who are to remain in Belarus. Those diplomats to depart the country will be given 72 hours to do so (until 3:00 p.m. local time March 27). Lazerko underscored that in the event the Embassy did not present such a list by March 24, the MFA will declare their own list of American diplomats "persona non grata" so that overall staff numbers do not exceed 17.

Charge Requests Answers to U.S. Dipnote, Gets Few  
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15. (C) Charge responded to Lazerko's message by restating previous USG requests for an explanation of the reasons why the GOB requested staff cuts and reiterating that all Embassy staff members perform essential functions (ref B). In reply Lazerko stated that with "a low level of contacts and no state visits" there was no need for such a large U.S. Embassy staff, and that the GOB was basing its demand on Article 11 of the Vienna Convention, in which the receiving states can ask that missions be staffed at levels that are "reasonable and normal." Charge noted only that he would convey this newest information to Washington.

Comment  
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16. (C) Keeping the flag flying in Minsk requires us to be  
  
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flexible in the face of this latest GOB outrage: righteous indignation will only force us to close up shop. To achieve the USG goal of maintaining an effective diplomatic presence in Belarus, post requests that decisions on staffing cuts be made immediately. We will then be able to make necessary internal plans, but need not inform the GOB officially before March 24.

Moore